Custom Debian Distributions
Sense, scope, techniques and future

Andreas Tille

Debian Conference 5

Helsinki, 11. July, 2005
Custom Debian Distributions

Andreas Tille

Past
- Short history
- Obliged to users
- Limits to Growth
- Deriving from Debian

Present
- Grouping of packages
- Adapting package configuration
- Documentation

Future
- Technical
- Structural
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Origin

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- Debian-Junior (2000)

Amongst technical internal projects
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Evolution

- DebConf 3 renaming: *Custom Debian Distribution*
  - Distinction between technical projects and CDDs
  - Start of technical cooperation
- Forks coming back
  - SkoleLinux became Debian-Edu
  - DeMuDi
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Reduce confusion

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Reduce confusion
Customising Debian

- Debian > 10000 packages
- Users interested in *subset*
- Groups of specialised users
- Easy installation and configuration
- **No fork** from Debian

Basic idea: *Do not make a separate distribution but make Debian fit for special purpose instead*
Customising Debian

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Why including special applications

- Debian becomes larger and larger
  → How many packages are good for Debian?
  - Bring special applications under quality control
  - Attract wider user base
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3 Future
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Do we scale well?

1. Number of involved people
2. Number of packages
3. Number of architectures
4. Number of bugs
5. Number of users
6. Number of derivatives
7. Time span between releases
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Sub-structuring Debian

- Change of quantity into quality (Hegel)
  - To determine at the right moment the critical point where quantity changes into quality is one of the most important and difficult tasks in all the spheres of knowledge (Trotzki)
- Evolution … through quantitative transformations passing into qualitative (Darwin principle)
- CDDs can deal with nearly all dimensions of growth inside Debian
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- **Problem**
  - No. people
    - Smaller projects
    - Focussing work
    - Better control
  - No. packages
    - Subset
    - Closed package set
  - No. bugs
    - CDD relevant
    - Stronger focus
  - No. users
    - Specialists
    - Interested users
    - Known needs
  - No. derivatives
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  - Time span
    - Releases
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CDD scales well

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Commercial reasons

- Add something to Debian
  - Add non-free software
  - Add own installer, desktop configuration, etc.
- Service company needs a brand

Political reasons

- On behalf of government or organisation
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- Debian is an inflexible beast
- Ignore possibilities of DoOcracy
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- Relations to other Debian packages
  - Depends, recommends, suggests
  - Conflicts?
- User menus
  - Maintained via role-based tools
- Configuration
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User roles

- Not in the menu == not available
- Reduce menu to interesting part
User roles

- Not in the menu == not available
- Reduce menu to interesting part
Thankful user

Date: Tue, 5 Jul 2005
From: Djoume SALVETTI <salvetti@crans.org>
To: Andreas Tille <tille@debian.org>
Subject: Re: cdd ACCEPTED

Oups! Sorry for the noise, I have misconfigured my debarchiver. :-/

(BTW, many thanks for cdd-dev, I foudn it very usefull! :-) )

Djoume

Explanation

I dont really build a CDD. I’m working in a enginnering school (IFITEP) and I’m switching all PC (a hundred) from Redhat to Debian sarge. Each courses require a set of software, so I’m building a meta-package for each courses (debian-ifitpe-java, debian-ifitpe-maths, etc..) and adjust the dependency according to the need of the teacher. I will certainly have to adjust the dependency during the school year (for example if a teacher have forgotten to tell me something) and the best way I have found to keep the PC in sync is to:
- make the meta package as explained before
- make a local repository
- auto-upgrade the PC at boot time and with a cron
With the help of your CDD-HOWTO, I have found it very easy to build meta-package and I’ve have also decided to make a "private" meta-package with a selection of packages I can’t live without and use it when I made a new debian install.
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## Future

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Relay on package maintainer

- Cope with overworked / lazy / stubborn maintainers
- Group maintenance
Relay on package maintainer

Cope with overworked / lazy / stubborn maintainers

Group maintenance
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Cope with overworked / lazy / stubborn maintainers

Group maintenance
Fall-back if `debconf` not possible

- Give local admin helping hand
- Problems on upgrades might be solved by `cddtk`
  - Wrapper around `apt`
  - Store original config files
  - Move these in place before upgrades
  - Redo CDD specific configuration
Fall-back if `debconf` not possible

Give local admin helping hand

Problems on upgrades might be solved by `cddtk`

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Obliged to end users

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- Web-tools
  - Currently nothing
  - Possibility to do basic things automatically
- Very different between CDDs
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New generation toolkit

- Replace cdd-dev to build meta packages
- Alternatively resolve dependencies without meta packages
- Techniques for simple configuration
**New generation toolkit**

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New generation toolkit

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**CDD toolkit**

New generation toolkit

- Replace *cdd-dev* to build meta packages
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- Techniques for simple configuration
Live CDs and installers

- Live CD – nice to have
- Perfect to show off
- For real work: installer
- Make it “user-just-pressing-enter” like
Live-CDs and installers

- Live CD – nice to have
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  - For *real* work: installer
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- Tag WNPP bugs
- Idea: View on BTS for CDD dependencies
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User documentation
Custom Debian Distributions

Andreas Tille

Past
- Short history
- Obliged to users
- Limits to Growth
- Deriving from Debian

Present
- Grouping of packages
- Adapting package configuration
- Documentation

Future
- Technical
- Structural
Future of Debian

- CDD solve structural problems inside Debian
- Fit user interests
- Makes Debian stronger if done the right way

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This talk can be found at

http://people.debian.org/~tille/talks/

Andreas Tille <tille@debian.org>